

Amendment 2480 – To transfer the \$1 million earmarked for a Capitol Hill mansion to the National Park Service to ensure better care and protection of our Nation’s crumbling national treasures, including the National Mall, the Grand Canyon, the Statue of Liberty, and other dilapidated parks in disrepair in nearly every state.

Although the Interior Appropriations bill is designed to provide funds for the preservation of our public lands and resources across the country, one particular earmark funds a Washington D.C. mansion that is home to frequent social events, parties for congressional staffers, and re-election fundraises for members of Congress. Specifically, the bill provides a \$1 million earmark to the “Sewall Belmont House,” located on Constitution Avenue, just a few blocks from the Capitol.¹

At the same time, this bill provides funding for the National Park Service, which as of FY 2008, had a backlog of projects exceeding \$10 billion, having more than doubled since FY 1999

This amendment would transfer the \$1 million earmarked for a Capitol Hill mansion to the National Park Service to ensure better care and protection of our Nation’s crumbling national treasures, including the National Mall, the Grand Canyon, the Statue of Liberty, and other dilapidated parks in disrepair in nearly every state.

This \$1 million earmark for the Sewall-Belmont House brings the mansion’s tally of federal funding to over \$3 million.

According to its website, the Belmont House is home to a historical museum, and “explores the evolving role of women and their contributions to society through the continuing, and often untold, story of women's pursuit for equality.”

The museum part of the House “is the headquarters of the historic National Woman's Party and was the Washington home of its founder and Equal Rights Amendment author Alice Paul.”

Over the last nine years, the Belmont House has received over \$2 million in federal funding through earmarks under the National recreation and preservation account at the Department of Interior. According to the Committee Report, which cites Public Law 99-498 (text is not available online, have asked CRS for it) Congress previous agreed to fund the Belmont House. However, despite this, there have been several years since FY 2000 that an earmark for the entity has not been included in the annual appropriations bills.

This \$1 million earmark would be the seventh for the Sewall-Belmont House. Although parts of the mansion are used for historical purposes, it is questionable at

¹ Senate Report 111-38 to accompany H.R. 2996, page 105 http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_reports&docid=f:sr038.pdf

best that taxpayer funds would be directed year after year to a facility that is commonly used for re-election fundraises and parties for congressional staffers. In addition, the Department of Interior faces extensive backlogs of historic areas and national parks across the country in need of serious repair. Yet, scarce federal funding is being siphoned away from these projects and directed to a local mansion frequented by well-connected DC insiders and members of Congress.

This amendment would transfer the \$1 million in taxpayer funding from the Belmont House and put it towards the National Parks Service backlog of national parks and treasures across the country in serious need of significant repairs.

Federal Funding for the Belmont House

FY2000: \$500,000²

FY2001: \$495,000³

FY2002: \$500,000⁴

FY2003: \$400,000⁵

FY2005: \$400,000⁶

FY2006: \$100,000⁷

FY 2008: \$40,461⁸

FY2010: \$1,000,000⁹

Total: \$3,435,461

This Capitol Hill mansion has become the perfect location for political fundraisers.

The Sewall Belmont House on its website advertises, “With a National Historic Landmark designation and the only historic home and garden for rent on Capitol Hill, the Sewall-Belmont House & Museum offers a unique and appealing setting for your special event.”¹⁰

According to a press release on the Sewall-Belmont website the building is described as an, “elegant Capitol Hill mansion, built in a combination of the Federalist and Queen Anne styles.”¹¹

² [House Conference Report 106-479](#), p. 457, or 458 of the PDF

³ Conference Report FY 01 Interior Approps

⁴ [Senate Report 107-201](#), p. 90

⁵ FY 04 Consolidated Omni Approps Report

⁶ FY 05 Consolidated Omni Approps Report

⁷ [House Conference Report, 109-307](#), p. 302

⁸ USA Spending search. Funding through the Institute of Museum and Library Services

⁹ Senate Appropriations Committee Recommendation: \$1,000,000 (Source: [Senate Report 111-66](#), p. 232)

¹⁰ Sewall Belmont House & Museum Website. Private Events http://www.sewallbelmont.org/mainpages/rentals_overview.html

¹¹ HGTV and the National Trust Honor Sewall-Belmont House, In Washington, D.C. October 25, 2009
http://www.sewallbelmont.org/PDF/press_releases/hgtv_PR.pdf

Due to its close location and to the Capitol and Senate office buildings, situated literally right next door to several Senate buildings, the Belmont House has become an ideal location for fundraisers for members of Congress from both sides of the aisle.

For example, in October of 2008, the National Republican Senatorial Committee held a fundraiser at the Sewall-Belmont House and Museum in which, at the time, was expected to raise approximately \$1 million from the event.¹²

Additionally, last April, one congressman had his “100% Imported from New York Deli Fundraiser” at the Sewall Belmont House, with individual tickets selling for \$1,000.¹³

According to Federal Election Commission records, at least 10 election fundraisers have been held at the Sewall-Belmont house.¹⁴

It is inappropriate for Congress to earmark millions of taxpayer dollars for convenient mansions often used by these same members of Congress for re-election fundraisers.

This Belmont House is an ideal location for congressional receptions for Hill staffers and members of Congress

The Belmont House is home to numerous charity events, congressional receptions, and lobbying events attended by congressional staff and members. The following are just these examples of these types of events. While not an exclusive list, these three events demonstrate the type of special events held at the House used to lobby members of Congress and their staff.

- COWPIE— Committee of Wyoming People in the East Annual Party

In June, the Belmont House played host to a Wyoming State Society Party celebrating the opening weekend of Cheyenne Frontier Days (largest rodeo in the country). On one site, the party was advertised this way, “HELL YEAH! Get out your boots and start shining your buckle! Join Wyoming State Society for the best party of the summer! As always, your ticket includes live band, mechanical bull, beer & Jack Daniels.”

- The 7th annual Guinness Congressional Perfect Pint Challenge for Charity

¹²

Bush Raises \$1 Million for Senate Republicans. *Associated Press*. October 21, 2008.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory?id=6083811>

¹³ Sunlight Foundation. Party Time. <http://politicalpartytime.org/party/876/>

¹⁴ Federal Election Commission address query: 144 Constitution Ave NE Washington D.C. 20002

Politico, a Capitol Hill newspaper, provided this description of how the reception could be a bit on the rowdy side, "The 7th annual Guinness Congressional Perfect Pint Challenge for Charity is tonight at the Sewall-Belmont House. Watch Members of Congress "take the challenge" - whatever that means - if "take the challenge" is new slang for "shotgunning beers" this will be the best charity event in history."¹⁵

- Rock the Hill, held by the Canadian government

In a news release titled "Canada Rocks the Hill," the government of Canada's website talks about how members of Congress and hill staffers got to mingle with professional musicians, a Hollywood star and the "Holy Grail of the hockey world." The article states:

"The Embassy of Canada welcomed the Members and Staff of the 110th Congress to a rock'n good time at the Sewall Belmont House on Capitol Hill. Canadian Country artists and Academy of Country Music nominated Emerson Drive and Leslie Nielsen of Naked Gun fame entertained the over 600 guests in attendance. Hill Staffers and Congressional Representatives were also treated to a rare opportunity to be in the presence of the Holy Grail of the hockey world, the coveted Stanley Cup."¹⁶

The Belmont House recently reported over \$4 million in total net assets in 2007, the last year for which records are available.

The National Women's Party owns and operates the Sewall-Belmont House and Museum, and judging by its publicly available IRS Form 990s, the National Woman's Party (NWP) is hardly in need of a taxpayer handout.

The organization reported over \$300,000 in savings and temporary cash investments. Additionally, it reported total net assets of over \$4 million at the end of 2007, the latest year for which data are available, the National Woman's party and the Sewall-Belmont House & Museum do not exactly paint a picture of dire financial need, especially during this time of financial uncertainty for many.¹⁷

This Belmont House charges up to \$5,000 for receptions and weddings

Besides just re-election fundraisers and congressional receptions the earmark recipient has become a great location to hold high priced Washington D.C. weddings. However, it is not cheap to rent the Sewall-Belmont House for a

¹⁵ *Politico*, March 13, 2007 http://www.politico.com/blogs/anneschroeder/0307/Red_Eh_Blue_Eh_Eh_Green_Yes.html

¹⁶ Canada Rocks The Hill <http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/washington/events-evenements/hillevent0307.aspx?lang=eng>

¹⁷ National Woman's Party Irs Form 990, Tax Year 2007 <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments//2007/530/116/2007-530116540-03c28e09-9.pdf>

reception and wedding. According to the rates listed on its website, to just rent the house, which does not include catering, the Belmont House charges up to \$5,000.¹⁸

Federal Funding for This and Other Museums Is Available Through Competitive Grants

According to its website, the mission of the Sewall-Belmont House and Museum is to “celebrate women’s progress toward–equality–and explores the evolving role of women and their contributions to society–through educational programs, tours, exhibits, research and publications.”¹⁹

Additionally, according to Washington Watch, the purpose of the earmark is to preserve and catalogue over \$10,000 pieces of the collection, such as news clippings and photographs.²⁰

While this is an extremely laudable cause, even without this earmark, federal funds are available for this and other museums through competitive grants. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has tens of millions of dollars in grants every year for museums. In addition to its past earmarks, in 2008, the Sewall Belmont house was awarded a \$40,000 grant from the IMLS.²¹

Additionally, the National Park Service (NPS) has numerous competitive grant programs available to protect our “nation’s significant historic and cultural sites.” According to the NPS’s website, “More than \$1 billion has been awarded to Federal, State, and local governments, Native American Tribes, nonprofit organizations and educational institutions for preservation projects in all 50 states and the U.S. Territories.”²²

Unlike congressional earmarks, these grants are awarded under an open and competitive process.

America’s national parks are threatened by a staggering maintenance backlog.

According to the Congressional Research Service, the Park Service backlog exceeds \$10 billion in FY 2008, having more than doubled since FY 1999.²³

A recent memo prepared by the Facility Management Division of the National Park Service reveals at least 10 states where NPS maintenance backlogs exceed \$100

¹⁸ Sewall-Belmont House Rental Rates.

<http://www.sewallbelmont.org/mainpages/documents/SBHMPrivateEventRentalRates.pdf>

¹⁹ Sewall Belmont mission statement http://www.sewallbelmont.org/mainpages/aboutus_mission.html

²⁰ Washington Watch. http://www.washingtonwatch.com/bills/show/ED_35685.html

²¹ USAspending.gov http://www.usaspending.gov/faads/faads.php?reptype=r&detail=-1&dtype=T&sortby=t&database=faads&recip_id=303502&fiscal_year=2008&record_num=f500

²² NPS Grants. <http://www.nps.gov/history/grants.htm>

²³ Vincent, Carol Hardy, Congressional Research Service: National Park Management; August 15, 2008.

million. At least twenty states have facilities with deferred maintenance exceeding \$50 million²⁴ (this excludes over \$4 billion in NPS road/bridge backlogs).

The state of Louisiana has over \$18 million on the National Park service maintenance backlog. For example, the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve accounts for \$11.8 million of the backlog alone. Additionally, the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park has a backlog of over \$2.2 million.²⁵

Despite historic appropriation levels, a recent congressional inquiry revealed that the NPS maintenance backlog grew by \$400 million during a nine month period last year.²⁶

On top of all that Congress continues to authorize, the NPS must manage the following:

- 27,000 historic structures
- 7,580 administrative and public use buildings
- 26,830 campsites
- 8,505 monuments and statues
- 505 dams
- 1,804 bridges and tunnels
- 8,500 miles of road to maintain
- 680 water treatment and wastewater systems
- 84+ million acres of land under management of the National Park Service;
- 391 units
- 54 National Wilderness Areas/44 million acres
- 15 National Wild and Scenic Rivers/2,451 miles

²⁴ Summary Provided to Congressional Research Service: NPS Asset Management Challenge, December 11, 2007.

²⁵ National Park Service: Excel Spreadsheet Prepared for Senator Tom Coburn, October 27, 2008.

²⁶ National Park Service: Excel Spreadsheet Prepared for Senator Tom Coburn, October 27, 2008.

- 40 National Heritage Areas
- 28 National Memorials
- 4 National Parkways
- 120 National Historic Parks
- 20 National Preserves and Reserves
- 24 National Battlefields
- 18 National Recreation Areas
- 74 National Monument Areas
- 10 National Seashores
- 4 National Lakeshores
- 3,565 miles of National Scenic Trails
- 12,250 miles of unpaved trails
- 46 miles of Canadian border/285 miles of the Mexican to patrol/manage
- 272 million visits annually

The crown jewels of our National Parks system are crumbling.

The USS Arizona (where 1,117 American patriots lost their lives in the savage Pearl Harbor attack) now faces a maintenance backlog of \$33.4 million. “The visitor center at the USS Arizona Memorial in Hawaii is sinking and may cost as much as \$20 million to repair—a cost that exceeds the entire annual budget for the seven national park sites in the state.”²⁷

The Gettysburg National Battlefield, site of the 51,000 American casualties, now faces \$29.4 million backlog.

²⁷ National Parks Conservation Association; “Overwhelming Backlogs, Maintenance Needs;” last accessed on February 3, 2009; http://www.npca.org/what_we_do/visitor_experience/backlog/maintenance.html.

Perhaps the greatest symbol of our nation, Statue of Liberty Park faces a \$196.9 million maintenance backlog.²⁸

Grand Canyon National Park faces a backlog of \$299.2 million.²⁹

In Montana, Glacier National Park faces a staggering maintenance backlog of \$400 million, including the stabilization of historic structures.³⁰ A former NPS official described the park as “bankrupt.”³¹

A leading parks advocacy group places the Petrified Forest National Park among the most ten most endangered parks in America³².

Americans are increasingly being denied access to their national parks because of the growing maintenance backlog.

According to a recent article in the Arizona Republic, Grand Canyon Park (10 million visitors annually), “Popular Grand Canyon trails are badly eroded, leading to more and more closures.”³³

According to Representative Rob Bishop (UT), Dinosaur National Monument is largely inaccessible due to its overwhelming backlog: The center is designed “so a kid can go in there and actually see within the mountainside the fossils that are still there and see what scientists say is the beginning and be able to put them together. Unfortunately, no one has been able to access this building for the last 10 years because we don't have enough money to fix this building, which has been condemned.”³⁴

The health and safety of parks’ visitors and employees is threatened by the growing maintenance backlog.

According to the Inspector General of the Department of the Interior, “Financial management has remained a top challenge for the department,” “[And] our work has

²⁸ National Park Service: Excel Spreadsheet Prepared for Senator Tom Coburn, October 27, 2008.

²⁹ National Park Service: Excel Spreadsheet Prepared for Senator Tom Coburn, October 27, 2008.

³⁰ National Parks Conservation Association: “Overwhelming Backlog,” Last accessed on March 13, 2009, http://www.npca.org/what_we_do/visitor_experience/backlog/maintenance.html.

³¹ Jamison, Michael, The Missoulian: “Visits, and bills, rise - Funding cuts, more tourists strain infrastructure,” <http://www.missoula.com/news/node/1721>.

³² National Parks Conservation Association: “Group Names Annual List of America's Ten Most Endangered National Parks,” April 4, 2001, http://www.npca.org/media_center/press_releases/2001/page-27598999.html.

³³ The Arizona Republic, Editorial: “A Chasm in Funding,” December 29, 2008, <http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/2008/12/29/20081229mon1-29.html>.

³⁴ Bishop, Representative Rob, Congressional Record, Page H 3284, March 11, 2009.

documented decades of maintenance, health and safety issues that place [Interior] employees and the public at risk."³⁵

A recent report by the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees found, "widespread evidence of major problems that will be evident - including decreased safety for visitors, longer emergency response times, endangerment of protected resources, and dirtier and less well-maintained parks - and that the problems will only grow worse in the coming years."³⁶

Examples of impact on parks' visitors include:

At the Grand Canyon, "The cross-canyon waterline is deteriorating so badly that it had 30-some leaks this year and is in danger of failing entirely."³⁷

At Yellowstone, "about 10,000 gallons of raw sewage leaked from a broken pipe and may have flowed into a trout-spawning stream in Yellowstone National Park."³⁸

At Carlsbad Caverns, maintenance needs were so pressing at one point that sewer lines were actually leaking into the historic caves. Carlsbad superintendent Benjamin said: "Believe me, if there's sewage dripping down into that cavern, people are not going to believe we're doing a good job."³⁹

³⁵ Kendall, Mary, Acting Inspector General of the Department of the Interior: "Testimony before House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior," March 3, 2009.

³⁶ Coalition of National Park Service Retirees: "A Reality Check- What Visitors Will To America's National Parks Will Experience During Summer 2006," June 15, 2006, <http://www.npsretirees.org/cnpsr/reality-check-summer-survey>.

³⁷ The Arizona Republic, Editorial: "A Chasm in Funding," December 29, 2008, <http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/articles/2008/12/29/20081229mon1-29.html>.

³⁸ New York Times: National Brief, June 9, 2001, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B03E2D9143EF93AA35755C0A9679C8B63>.

³⁹ NATIONAL PARKS FAST FALLING INTO DISREPAIR: From aging facilities to overgrown trails, reaching the backcountry is getting harder. May 25, 2004 <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0525/p01s02-usgn.html>.